

# **Traffic Council Policy 1: On-Street Parking Guidance**

*Date Adopted: April 1, 2008*

As defined by City ordinance, it is the purpose of the Traffic Council to take action on requests for site-specific changes to parking and traffic regulations. The Traffic Council aims to be fair and consistent in its decisions when similar situations present themselves and, over time, its actions have evolved into some implicit policies. The most frequently observed policies relating to on-street parking are listed below and are intended to put such practices in print to be used as guidelines for the future. Members of Traffic Council hope that this information offers guidance to the public, Board members, and staff as it affects projects or proposals they may consider.

## **1. SAFE ACCESS for EMERGENCY VEHICLES**

On-street parking must allow adequate space for fire engines and other emergency vehicles to navigate. To support this requirement, it shall be the general practice of Traffic Council to limit parking to one side on those streets with a width of less than 24 feet, unless the demand for on-street parking is consistently low. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, the restricted side shall be the side of the street where fire hydrants are located.

## **2. INSTITUTIONS**

While it is desirable for the City to require institutions such as Newton-Wellesley Hospital, Boston College and Lasell College to provide adequate parking for all of their demand on their own site, nonprofit institutions are protected by the Dover Act, which often allows exceptions to local standards and may create parking spillover onto adjacent streets, including residential streets. The Traffic Council supports collaborative efforts to solve problems and address mutual concerns between the City and such institutions. However, when institutional parking adversely impacts nearby neighborhoods, it shall be the general practice of Traffic Council to establish parking restrictions to allow for adequate use of the street by residents as well as their visitors and contractors. The Traffic Council's general practice has been to employ the least restrictive means available to limit spillover, since residents must also abide by whatever restrictions are places on the streets in front of their homes.

## **3. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

Many areas of Newton are fortunate to be located within easy walking distance of MBTA rail and bus service. The City encourages the use of public transportation for all the environmental, social, economic, political and other benefits it can provide. The MBTA provides parking at several Green Line stations. Commuter rail users may park at public parking lots and at long-term metered spaces on the streets in Auburndale, West Newton, and Newtonville. Limited long-term parking is available for Express Bus commuters. Given the availability of long-term parking options, it shall be the general practice of Traffic Council to attempt to protect streets nearest Green Line and Commuter Rail stations from overuse by commuters in search of free all-day parking. In the process, the Traffic Council shall strive to balance the parking needs of residents and their visitors while ensuring safe access for emergency vehicles (see #1 above) while also providing Express Bus commuters with some ability to park on public streets near express bus stops in Newton.

## **4. SCHOOLS**

The Traffic Council shall strive to balance the convenience of parents, residents, and teachers; to maximize safety around schools; and to encourage non-motorized transportation to/from our schools. All of our schools are located in residential neighborhoods and are close enough to most residences so that most elementary school students can walk to school. While the Traffic Council endorses efforts to encourage walking to school, it also recognizes that some children must be driven and shall attempt to provide drop-off and pick-up areas in safe and convenient locations for those who cannot walk to school. Priority locations shall be given to public transportation because it is a more environmentally friendly alternative, however some limited parking around our schools is often necessary for parents who need to enter the school building. On-site parking for teachers is provided at most sites, but is generally inadequate to provide parking for all staff who must drive to school. It shall be the general practice of Traffic Council to ensure adequate (but not unlimited) parking for school staff.

## **5. OTHER PUBLIC BUILDINGS and PARKS**

Parks, City Hall, libraries and other public buildings provide a benefit to all Newton residents, and it shall be the general practice of Traffic Council to help ensure that these facilities are available to all residents. To support this policy, Traffic Council shall ensure that adequate parking is available to access public facilities. However, Traffic Council will strive to strike a balance, which will also provide reasonable opportunity for residents and their contractors and visitors to park near their homes.

## **6. VILLAGE CENTERS and OTHER AREAS with DEMAND for ON-STREET PARKING, INCLUDING AREAS ABUTTING DOVER-PROTECTED USES**

One of the objectives of the City's *Comprehensive Plan* is to foster thriving village centers, with successful businesses in Newton. It is also true that successful businesses exist throughout the City – some without adequate off-street parking that sometimes impacts nearby residential streets. City zoning and land use requirements strive to regulate on-site parking for businesses. In order to contain village center parking and maintain the neighborhood character of nearby street, the Traffic Council shall regulate the number of vehicles permitted to park on nearby residential streets. In doing so, the Traffic Council shall strive to balance the need for some employee and visitor parking, as long as residents and their contractors and visitors have reasonable opportunity for on street parking near their homes.

## **7. RESIDENT-ONLY PARKING**

Through various actions over the years, the Board of Aldermen has supported decisions that favor sharing of our City streets. Simply put, the streets belong to everybody. As such, the Traffic Council generally does not support exclusive resident-only parking on public streets except when all other measures to share parking have failed to provide residents with reasonable use or access to their homes. Additionally, resident-only parking during the daytime hours when many residents are at work elsewhere, has the effect of clearing the streets so nobody can park there, even when the residents wouldn't need to, thus eliminating parking unnecessarily.

## **8. PERMIT PROGRAMS**

Over the years, various permit programs have been discussed. Some remain promising. Parking Benefit Districts are hybrids of resident-only parking programs, but provide a limited number of passes to non-residents of the street to park in front of specific homes during weekdays, thus allowing for better use of these limited resources. Parking passes that would allow passholders to park in metered and/or nonmetered spaces throughout the City have been discussed as a means to free people from having to carry coins, and/or to ensure that parking spaces will be available in various parts of the City. Such options are not yet developed for use, but show promise as future tools for addressing parking problems.

## **9. PARKING METERS IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS**

It has been the practice of the Traffic Council *not* to place parking meters in front of homes in residential districts. Where residences are located in nonresidential zones, the Traffic Council shall consider: whether available parking closest to the activity center has been maximized; the availability of on-site parking for nearby residential uses; how proposed metered curbside parking spaces would best be used; proximity to public transportation; whether parking demand is created by nonresident commuters; and whether metering will further the City's parking and housing goals. In its deliberations about managing parking in such an area, the Traffic Council shall consider whether paid parking by permit or non-metered arrangement will encourage the optimal parking behavior in areas where homes abut commercial areas, thus allowing for good parking management but eliminating unsightly meters.